

The RACE ISSUE and a Christian Principle

By

L. Nelson Bell, M.D., F.A.C.S.

Foreword: This reprint is being made at the request of a large number of people who heard Dr. Bell discuss the matter of Christian race-relations in a radio address.

The first section, "The Race Issue and a Christian Principle" was the basis of Dr. Bell's talk before LIFE magazine's symposium on race relations in Swamscott, Mass. and appeared in the Oct. 1st, 1956 issue of LIFE.

The second section is taken from an editorial by Dr. Bell, appearing in the June 26th, 1963 issue of the PRESBYTERIAN JOURNAL.

The Race Issue and a Christian Principle

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1. Christians should recognize that there is no biblical basis or legal justification for segregation. Segregation, as enjoined in the Old Testament, had to do with religious separation while the New Testament lends no comfort to the idea of racial segregation within the Christian Church. For these reasons it can be safely affirmed that segregation of races enforced by law is both un-Christian and un-American.
2. It can be demonstrated with equal logic that forced integration of the races is sociologically impracticable and at the same time such forced alignments violate the right of personal choice.
3. The Christian concept of race may be expressed in the following way:
 - a. God makes no distinction among men; all are alike the objects of His love, mercy and proffered redemptive work.
 - b. For this reason, all Christians are brothers in Christ, regardless of race or color.
 - c. The inescapable corollary to these truths is that Church membership should be open to all without discrimination or restriction.
4. In the light of these basically Christian affirmations the Church should implement them as follows:

- a. All churches should be open to attendance and membership without reference to race or color.
 - b. Recognize that in so doing, in most areas and under normal conditions this will not result in an integrated church, for various races will prefer separate churches for social, economic, educational and many other reasons.
 - c. But, this opening of the doors of the churches will break down the man-made and sinful barrier which stems from prejudice and recognize the unquestioned Christian principle of man's uniform need of God's redemptive work in Christ, a need and a salvation which knows no distinction of race or color.
5. To aid in an honest and just solution of this problem on every level, the Church should frankly recognize that racial differences, implying neither inferiority nor superiority in God's sight, are nevertheless actual differences which usually express themselves in social preferences and alignments which are a matter of personal choice, not related to either pride or prejudice. Because of this and because there is no Christian principle involved, the Church should neither foster nor force, in the name of Christianity, a social integration which may be neither desired or desirable.
6. The Church should concentrate greater energy on condemning those sinful attitudes of mind and heart where hate, prejudice and indifference continue to foster injustice and discrimination and in so doing show that these attitudes are SIN.

7. The problem of the public schools constitutes a dilemma in many areas in the South which both the Church and the courts of the land should recognize and admit. Because these schools are tax-supported, they are in name and in fact "public" schools.

At the same time, because *ratio* of the races varies in different localities the problem also varies from the simple in some areas to the apparently insoluble at the present time in others. Those who live where only ten or fifteen percent of the population is of a minority race have no serious problem. Where that ratio is reversed the issue is one of the greatest magnitude and those who have to deal with it deserve the sympathetic concern and understanding of others.

It must be recognized by both Church and State that at this time, and under present conditions, the problem involves social, moral, hygienic, educational and other factors which admit no immediate or easy solution, and the phrase, "with all due haste," must be interpreted on the one hand as requiring an honest effort to solve the problem, and on the other by the leniency and consideration which existing conditions demand.

8. Finally, the Church has a grave responsibility in this issue; a responsibility to proclaim love, tolerance and justice to all as basic Christian virtues, to be accepted in theory and practiced in fact.

Basic to this concept is the urgent necessity of removing all barriers to spiritual fellowship in Christ, without at the same time attempting to force un-natural social relationships.

The Church has the responsibility of recognizing that more than spiritual issues are involved and that while freely admitting full spiritual and legal rights to all, there are at the same time, social implications and considerations which involve the matter of personal choice, over which the Church has no jurisdiction and into which it should not intrude in the name of Christianity.

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A PLEA FOR COMMUNICATION

Christians are deeply concerned over the growing racial tensions in this country, tensions which increase the difficulty of a proper solution.

On the one hand there has been a determination to perpetuate segregation in a manner which causes deep resentment. On the other there is a growing emphasis on recourses which depend on mob psychology.

We recently witnessed two incidents which all need to ponder. We had lunch at a well known chain restaurant in central North Carolina. A Negro couple were eating there and it caused no outward reaction that we could see. We took occasion to congratulate the management on the realistic approach to an emerging need.

Some days later we drove by another restaurant of this same chain only a few miles away. Evidently this particular restaurant had not yet begun serving Negroes. As a result a "demonstration" was taking place with nearly 500 Negroes in a chain around the restaurant shouting and clapping as they marched. Others were seated in front of the restaurant blocking the entrance.

We think the restaurant should long ago have revised its policy about serving Negroes. But, the "peaceful demonstration" of hundreds of yelling children was also a violation of civil rights.

Last year I was in a restaurant in Asheville when a Negro in the uniform of the Air Force asked for service but was told it was not possible. As he walked away I followed him and told him I was sorry. He replied, "I understand, I am from the South." It seems that he had just returned from Japan and was passing through the city in his car, enroute home.

A few days ago I was in the same restaurant and a Negro couple came in. They were seated and served without question and without incident. This was, I believe, a desirable change indicated by fairness and the time in which we live.

During the height of the Birmingham demonstrations we were in Europe and the Middle East. The papers played up the use of police dogs and fire hoses but never once mentioned the restraint exercised by many of the police who were charged with enforcing law and order (even if the laws no longer meet the present situation), in the face of mob demonstrations.

One of our chief concerns is the effect these demonstrations are having on young people, both Negro and white. Many white boys and girls, encouraged no doubt by their parents, have participated in counter demonstrations involving insults and violence. At the same time many Negro young people are being led into a psychological blind-alley — following the idea that "rights" can be secured by mob action.

All of this is having a traumatic effect on a generation already showing evidence of little respect for law.

What is needed above all else is communication and conference between responsible leaders of the two races. We seriously question that "Christian" leadership which participates in demonstrations and in so doing compounds the problem. We also wonder how responsible Negro leaders hope to accomplish their ultimate aims by inciting young people to defiant demonstrations.

At the same time care must be taken that under the guise of "civil rights" a form of legalized tyranny by a minority is not imposed on our country.

Where laws perpetuate injustices they must be changed. But if illegal measures are used to get rid of unjust laws can the end result be anything but anarchy?

Hovering on the outskirts of the problem are the Black Muslims and subversive groups only too anxious to capitalize on unrest.

This is a time when long-held opinions must be examined in the light of the world in which we now live. It is also a time when the responsible leadership of both races must work together to solve a political, economic and social problem which festers to the confusion and danger of all concerned.

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